

The Story of
**"THE
SHEPHERD'S
ROD"**

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*The Committee on
Defense Literature of the General Conference of
Seventh-day Adventists*

(October, 1955)

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This brief documented story of "The Shepherd's Rod" has been prepared from extant records for the purpose of supplementing what others have already written on the subject.

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The Story of "The Shepherd's Rod"

The Shepherd's Rod party, or Davidian Seventh-day Adventists, is an offshoot from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was started by Victor T. Houteff, who was born in Raikovo, Bulgaria, March 2, 1885, and died at Waco, Texas, U.S.A., on February 5, 1955.¹

"Mr. Houteff's first religious affiliation was with the Greek Orthodox Church."¹ Becoming involved in difficulty with the leaders of that religious denomination, and with those of the Bulgarian Government, he was violently expelled from the country of his birth.² It was in 1907 that he came to the United States.

Victor Houteff was baptized at Rockford, Illinois, and accepted into membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 10, 1919.³ He moved from Illinois to California prior to the camp meeting held in the Los Angeles area in 1923.⁴

Disaffection came early in the man's experience, for, dissatisfied with the care given him at one of our sanitariums, he was tempted with doubt: "Is that sanitarium God's place for His sick people? I asked myself. Is this people really God's people? The answer that came to these questions was this: The sanitarium is God's, and the church is God's, but the people that are running them are reactionaries, they are the modern priests, scribes and Pharisees, that there is a need for more Samaritans among them. This is where God's truth is, though, and God helping me, I said, I shall stay with it."⁵ Thus a root of bitterness sprang up in his heart.

Victor Houteff and the SDA Church

Mr. Houteff was never employed as a worker in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In December of 1925 he requested that his membership be transferred to the Seventh-day Adventist church in the Olympic Exposition Park area of Los Angeles, then located on Hoover Street and sometimes called the Tabernacle church.⁶ Walter H. Schacht says of him: "When I came to the Exposition Park in 1929 he was assistant superintendent of the Sabbath school. It was his duty to arrange for the teachers' meeting; he took charge of that himself. . . . It was in his teachings of the Sabbath school lessons that he began to bring in his own peculiar ideas."⁷ He was a "Sabbath school teacher in the years 1928 and 1929."¹

Elder Schacht reports that at the request of some of the Sabbath school members Mr. Houteff studied with them in the church on Sabbath afternoons. "Not long after, complaints came from some of our people that the things he was teaching did not check with Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, and we asked him not to continue in the church. As he said, he went across the street and continued his studies. . . . In due course he had to be dropped, and later some of his followers were also disfellowshipped."⁷ Elder Schacht reports also: "I was chairman of the business meeting that dropped his name."⁷

The move to disfellowship Mr. Houteff and his followers was not made until after due efforts to save them from their error had failed. As is customary in Seventh-day Adventist churches, every effort possible was made by the pastors and other faithful persons in the local church to save the man from his error before any action was taken to drop his name from the church roll.⁸

The Church Takes Action

The church board of the Olympic Exposition Park church, in Los Angeles, in a meeting held on November 14, 1929, gave study to the problem that Mr. Houteff was creating, and voted that he discontinue holding such meetings in the church.⁹ The board also voted to ask the conference to examine his teachings.⁹

In response to this request, J. E. Fulton, then president of the Pacific Union Conference; P. E. Brodersen, then president of the Southern California Conference; B. M. Emerson, then Pacific Union Conference secretary-treasurer; and one or two others, including W. G. Wirth, a Bible teacher at the College of Medical Evangelists, were delegated by the conference committee to meet Houteff at the Olympic Exposition Park church with Elder Schacht. Mr. Houteff presented his views, and they were so fanciful that they did not take them seriously,¹⁰ says Dr. Wirth.

Determined to spread further his erroneous teachings, Mr. Houteff issued his doctrines in hectographed form under the title of "The Shepherd's Rod" in the spring of 1930. And he distributed thirty-three copies among leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church during the General Conference held in San Francisco, California, from May 29 to June 12 of 1930.¹¹ He says: "These manuscripts

contained only the first 172 pages of the book dealing with the 144,000 and a call for reformation."¹²

The leaders of the denomination were then exceedingly occupied with the services and the business of that great meeting, and could not give to that document the immediate study and consideration that he demanded. Moreover, since the Houteff affair was at that time merely a local one, the matter was left to the local and the union conference concerned.

Nevertheless, F. C. Gilbert, a veteran field secretary of the General Conference, examined the treatise and found that it contained error. On June 26, shortly after a copy of *The Shepherd's Rod* had been given to him, Elder Gilbert wrote a letter to the author and pointed out to him that his teachings were erroneous and should be given up.¹³ At the same time Elder Gilbert wrote to the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in the Los Angeles area a similar report.

The church board of the Olympic Exposition Park church, in Los Angeles, met on July 23, 1930, with the conference president in attendance, and voted to recommend to a church business meeting that Mr. Houteff be disciplined, that he be asked to retract a statement that W. A. Spicer was not a Sabbathkeeper, and to apologize for his rebellious attitude toward the church on Sabbath morning, November 16, 1929. It requested the conference president to be present at the church business meeting.¹⁴

On August 14, 1930, the church board held still another meeting, the record of which contains this item: "It was moved and supported that Brother Houteff be asked to retract his statement that Elder Spicer is not a Sabbathkeeper and to apologize for the disturbance in the church on Sabbath, November 30, 1929. Since Brother Houteff did not make these apologies, the motion was amended as follows, [that] the church wished to express its disapproval of Brother Houteff's action in this matter."¹⁵ The conference president was present at this meeting, as was also Mr. Houteff.

A little later another effort was made to save the erring soul. On October 16, 1930, J. E. Fulton, the Pacific Union Conference president; P. E. Brodersen, president of the Southern California Conference; W. H. Schacht, pastor of the Olympic Exposition Park church; and W. G. Wirth¹⁶ "met with the author of *The Shepherd's Rod* in the Pacific Union Conference office, and pointed out to him

that the teaching of *The Shepherd's Rod* was wrong. Action was taken as follows: "The Shepherd's Rod" is neither true to simple facts, nor true to the word of God, and it is condemned by the very "Testimonies" it quotes from. We warn our dear brethren against the false conclusions this poor man has come to.'"¹⁵

Still set in opposition to all the counsel given him by brethren of experience in California, Mr. Houteff began to propagate his teachings in printed form. He took *The Shepherd's Rod* to a printer in Los Angeles in November, 1930, and it was issued as a book of 255 pages the following December.¹⁶ Copies were then mailed to many denominational workers.

In the meantime, the church of which he was a member made a final effort to save him. Herewith is a transcript of the official record of the specially called business meeting held on November 20, 1930, to consider his case:

"A special business meeting was held on this evening in reference to Brother Houteff's teachings. Present were Elder [J. E.] Fulton, Elder [P. E.] Brodersen, Dr. [W. G.] Wirth, and Prof. [L. W.] Avery. Elder [W. H.] Schacht was the presiding officer. . . .

"A letter from Elder [F. C.] Gilbert, commenting on Brother Houteff's teachings, was read by Elder Schacht, [and] this was followed by an earnest appeal by Elder Fulton, saying Brother Houteff's teachings were not in harmony with the Bible nor the Spirit of prophecy, and he could see no light in them. Elder Brodersen followed with timely remarks, saying he could not follow Brother Houteff in his teachings, which he considered dangerous. Elder Fulton made a strong appeal to Brother Houteff to drop his teachings; but after a long and tiresome discourse by Brother Houteff, he refused to follow this advice. Timely remarks were also made by Dr. Wirth and Prof. Avery.

"A motion was then made by Brother Rhodes, and supported, that for the protection of the church we withdraw the membership of Brother Houteff and our fellowship with him until such a time as he will conform to the church and withdraw his teachings. This motion was carried."¹⁷

Because Mr. Houteff persisted in propagating his ideas, there was nothing else to do but to disfellowship him from the church.

In 1885 the Lord had sent to His people this timely warning: "There are a thousand temptations in disguise prepared for those

who have the light of truth; and the only safety for any of us is in receiving no new doctrine, no new interpretation of the Scriptures, without first submitting it to brethren of experience. Lay it before them in a humble, teachable spirit, with earnest prayer; and if they see no light in it, yield to their judgment; for 'in the multitude of counselors there is safety.'"¹⁸

Victor Houteff himself once said: "At the time the message of 'The Shepherd's Rod' came, I was both a member and officer in one of our churches. It was after the book had been written that my name was dropped from the church records."¹⁹ Again: "My name was still on the church books at the time the 'Rod' was written."¹⁹ The brethren had been very, very patient with him. He had begun to teach his views in 1928, had continued it through 1929, and on into the greater part of 1930, and against repeated counsels of brethren of experience, before official action was taken to disfellowship him from the church.

And yet he himself wrote on April 22, 1932: "From the very start I tried to get either a private hearing, or else some of the leading men to come and see what it was all about, pleading with them that it was their duty to correct us if we were in error, or if we had any truth that they should know it. While they refused to give us any kind of hearing, they did everything possible to close our place of meeting, and some of those who attended these studies were frightened for fear of losing their church membership."²⁰

In September of 1932 the author of *The Shepherd's Rod* added a second volume, which consisted of 304 pages.²¹ And although the man had gone so far astray, efforts to recover him from his error were not yet abandoned. O. J. Graf, a veteran educator in the ranks of Seventh-day Adventists, and his wife arranged to meet with Mr. Houteff in their home at Loma Linda, California, to examine his teachings on November 11, 1932. Brother Graf said:

"Six persons were present: the author [of *The Shepherd's Rod*], two of his associates (a former leader in one of our churches who had some months before accepted the teachings of *The Shepherd's Rod*, but had since then discovered error in the book), Mrs. Graf and the writer. For nearly eight hours we studied, discussed and exchanged views."²²

In the meantime, other brethren of experience had examined the man's teachings and found them unsound. This is shown by

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the date of a letter that Elder G. A. Roberts wrote to Elder G. W. Chambers in Colorado, on November 16, 1932, saying that "Elder J. C. Stevens [pastor] of the Glendale church also prepared a review of the book"²³ by Mr. Houteff. He added: "I am sending herewith copy of matter gotten out by Elder [R. S.] Fries, who was then president of the Central California Conference," concerning the error taught by Mr. Houteff. Copies of these documents are still extant. In spite of this, Mr. Houteff later told people that his doctrine had never been considered by brethren of experience.

Moreover, O. J. Graf, who gave Mr. Houteff a hearing of eight hours' duration on November 11, 1932, issued a document entitled "*The Shepherd's Rod*" (*An Answer*) prior to March 14, 1933, in which he showed that he had carefully examined Mr. Houteff's teachings and found them in error.²⁴ Already issued was another document, *Review of "The Shepherd's Rod,"* by R. S. Fries, I. M. Burke, and C. J. Ritchie, also ministers of experience, in which the teachings of Mr. Houteff were shown to contain error.²⁴ Another minister of wide experience, B. F. Kneeland, had also prepared a document entitled *The "Shepherd's Rod" Not a Safe Guide*, in which the Houteff doctrine was shown to contain error.²⁴ Copies of these documents are still extant.

In 1933 Mr. Houteff began to issue a series of small tracts, which, he said, formed the third volume of *The Shepherd's Rod*.²¹ These and also the first volume of *The Shepherd's Rod* were revised after their first printing.

Request for an Additional Hearing

In the meantime Mr. Houteff was telling unsuspecting brethren that his teachings had never been given careful consideration by brethren of experience in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This charge, as we have shown, was not true.

But to leave him and all concerned without further doubt on that point, the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Fullerton, near Los Angeles, gave consideration in December of 1933 to a suggestion that arrangements be made for Mr. Houteff to be given another hearing by brethren of experience. And on January 18, 1934, they and Mr. Houteff jointly sent a formal written request to the Pacific Union Conference Committee for such a hearing to be held. Here is a copy²⁵ of that document:

"Los Angeles, California
"January 18, 1934

"To the Members of the
Pacific Union Conference Committee:

"Dear Brethren:—

"We, as members of the Tabernacle Church of S.D.A. of Fullerton, California, after counseling with Victor T. Houteff concerning the teachings of the 'Shepherd's Rod' respectfully request that you appoint a committee of ten to twelve 'brethren of experience' to meet with Brother Houteff while he places before them the evidence for his belief in the fundamentals of his message. The subjects to be considered are—'The Harvest,' 'Ezekiel 9,' 'The Leopard Beast of Revelation 13,' 'Hosea, chapters 1-2,' and 'Matthew 20.' In these studies Brother Houteff is to use only the writings of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. The time used is not to exceed one week.

"After each study the committee selected may retire for counsel, and may then submit its evidence for mistakes in Brother Houteff's teaching, such evidence to be drawn from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy only.

"If after the first study mistakes may be substantiated from authority mentioned above, further studies are not to be given. The same conditions are to prevail after each succeeding study.

"In case the committee find error in the teaching of 'The Shepherd's Rod,' and are able to refute same by the teachings of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, Brother Houteff agrees to renounce the advocacy of the 'Shepherd's Rod,' and to make public renunciation of same.

"Brother Houteff also agrees to discontinue the propagation of the 'Shepherd's Rod,' so far as he can control same, in the Pacific Union Conference, during the time this investigation is being made.

"The conditions hereby entered into are in compliance with the instruction given in *Testimonies*, vol. 5, page 293; *Testimonies on Sabbath School Work*, pages 65-66.

"Respectfully submitted

"Representatives for Tabernacle Church

"(Signed) J. W. Rich

"(Signed) L. R. Sommerville"

"For 'The Shepherd's Rod'

"(Signed) V. T. Houteff"

Los Angeles, Calif.
Jan. 18, 1934

To the Members of the Pacific Union Conf. Committee:

Dear Brethren:--

We, as members of the Tabernacle Church of S.D.A. of Fullerton, Calif. after counselling with Victor T. Houteff concerning the teachings of the "Shepherd's Rod" respectfully request that you appoint a committee of ten to twelve "brethren of experience" to meet with Brother Houteff while he places before them the evidence for his belief in the fundamentals of his message. The subjects to be considered are - "The Harvest", "Ezekiel 9", "The Leopard Beast of Rev. 13", "Revelation chapters 1-2", and "Matt. 20". In these studies Brother Houteff is to use only the writings of the 'Bible', and "The Spirit of Prophecy".

The time used is not to exceed one week.

After each study the committee selected may retire for counsel, and may then submit its evidence for mistakes in Brother Houteff's teaching, such evidence to be drawn from the Bible and "The Spirit of Prophecy" Only.

If after the first study mistakes may be substantiated from authority mentioned above, further studies are not to be given. The same conditions are to prevail after each succeeding study.

In case the committee find error in the teaching of "The Shepherd's Rod", and are able to refute ~~xxx~~ same by the teachings of the Bible and 'The Spirit of Prophecy' Brother Houteff agrees to renounce the advocacy of the "Shepherd's Rod", and to make public renunciation of same.

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Respectfully submitted

For "The Shepherd's Rod"

Representatives for Tabernacle Ch.

V. T. Houteff

W. H. Williams

J. H. Rich

W. H. Williams

FACSIMILE OF AGREEMENT

J. W. Rich, whose signature appears on the letter, was one of the ministers of the Southeastern California-Arizona Conference; and L. R. Sommerville was one of the elders of the SDA church in Fullerton.

Five days later—on January 23—Elder Rich sent Mr. Houteff a letter notifying him that the request for a hearing had been granted by the Pacific Union Conference Committee, and that it would be held as soon as arrangements could be made for a group of brethren of experience to get together for the purpose.²⁶

On February 15 Elders Prout and Rich went in person and informed Mr. Houteff orally that the hearing would be held on Monday, February 19.²⁷ Mr. Houteff was told who were the ministers appointed to hear him. But Mr. Houteff objected, and sent by Elders Prout and Rich an oral request to the union office that the hearing be postponed, saying that he had "a pre-arranged important engagement for that date"²⁷—February 19.

The twelve ministers appointed to hear Mr. Houteff on February 19 were the following: A. G. Daniells, a field secretary of the General Conference; Glenn A. Calkins, president of the Pacific Union Conference; G. A. Roberts, president of the Southern California Conference; C. S. Prout, president of the Southeastern California-Arizona Conference; W. G. Wirth, Bible teacher at the College of Medical Evangelists; H. M. S. Richards, evangelist; C. M. Sorenson, Bible teacher at Southern California Junior College; J. A. Burden, manager of Paradise Valley Sanitarium; J. C. Stevens, pastor of the SDA church in Glendale; W. M. Adams, religious liberty secretary of the Pacific Union Conference; J. E. Fulton, president of the Northern California Conference; and F. C. Gilbert, a field secretary of the General Conference.²⁸

Elder Daniells, who had previously served as president of the General Conference for twenty-one years, also had been closely associated with Mrs. E. G. White for many years. The other men were likewise workers of wide experience in the denomination.

A few hours after Elders Prout and Rich had personally notified Mr. Houteff on February 15 that the hearing would be held on February 19, Glenn Calkins, president of the Pacific Union Conference, sent on that same February 15 and by private dispatch, to ensure its speedy delivery, a letter to Mr. Houteff to confirm the oral notice given him by the two above-mentioned ministers.²⁹

On that same February 15 Mr. Houteff wrote to Elder Calkins to say that those veteran ministers chosen to hear him expound his views were "unfit for the occasion."⁸⁰ And he added: "It will be impossible for me to meet you brethren on the day stated by Elder Prout. I request that arrangement be made for a week from next Monday—February 26."⁸⁰ This was just four days before the scheduled date of the hearing.

The special committee, however, assembled on February 19, and Mr. Houteff attended the meeting. The brethren elected A. G. Daniells to serve as chairman and W. G. Wirth to be secretary for the group. Since J. E. Fulton was not able to attend, O. J. Graf, former president of Emmanuel Missionary College, had been appointed to serve in his stead. The meeting opened promptly at ten o'clock in the morning. Two stenographers were on hand to make a verbatim report of the proceedings. Mr. Houteff brought along five or six of his followers, and they were permitted to witness the hearing. After an earnest prayer by Elder Calkins the secretary read the letter of request that had brought the group together.⁸⁸

The chairman, Elder Daniells, expressed the hope that the hearing would be conducted in strict harmony with the terms of the agreement set forth in the written request, and suggested that Mr. Houteff be allowed to state his views without interruption by the members of the committee or anyone else present. The brethren agreed to this by unanimous vote. The chairman then suggested that if he should wish to do so, Mr. Houteff might feel free to present the first two subjects named in the request, those of "The Harvest" and "Ezekiel 9." This appeared to be agreeable to all. Moreover, the brethren manifested a willingness to grant Mr. Houteff a week, if necessary, for the presentation of his views.⁸⁸

It was also agreed that the stenographic report of Mr. Houteff's presentation of his theories should be transcribed for the use of the committee in reviewing the arguments set forth by him. Furthermore, the committee offered to supply him a copy to be edited by him and returned to the committee for its use in making this review. And this was sent to Mr. Houteff.⁸⁸

At 10:30 A.M. Mr. Houteff began his presentation of the subject of "The Harvest," and concluded at 12:30 P.M. He stated that he did not wish to present his views on "Ezekiel 9" until after the committee had rendered its report. He said that if his teachings

on this subject were unsound, there would be no need of discussing the others.

H. M. S. Richards, the present program director of the Voice of Prophecy radio work in English, was a member of that committee, as previously stated. He made notes in his diary from day to day as the committee did its work, and he says of the meeting of February 19:

"When he [Mr. Houteff] got through about one o'clock, Elder Daniells suggested [that] we go and get something to eat and come back and take up where he [Mr. Houteff] left off. He said, No, he would not go any further, it was useless for him to go further, [and] that our decision upon this one subject, The Harvest, would be our decision upon the whole of his doctrinal program, as that was the key to it. Elder Daniells urged him to go forward. He said, 'We have brought these men here from far away. They are ready to stay two days, three days, a week or two weeks, however long it is necessary for us to get the full picture in our minds. To us it is a serious thing. If you are right, we want to know it. If you are wrong, you ought to know it. We have spent a good deal of money to come here in a serious, honest attempt by the denomination to give you a hearing. Therefore let us go ahead.'

"Again Mr. Houteff refused. This happened a number of times. Any statement that he did not have all the time he wanted is absolutely false. He was urged to take more time, urged to take days, even weeks, but no, he refused to go any further at all. He wanted us to go immediately into some room and make our decision and come out and tell him. Elder Daniells said, 'No, if you won't go any further and you wish us to make a decision on what you have given us today, we must have time to study it, study the Bible and the Testimonies, and then after much study and prayer we will come to a decision.' It was decided that the decision was to be made upon a written record of his [Mr. Houteff's] talk supplied by the two secretaries."³¹

So Mr. Houteff definitely was informed that the committee would need time to study carefully the views he had presented, and to prepare its reply concerning them. Thus that meeting ended.³² Several meetings were held by the committee alone thereafter, and every point made in Mr. Houteff's presentation was carefully considered, together with what he had set forth in his writings. Before

the committee had proceeded far in its work, they wanted to make sure that Mr. Houteff had received a typewritten copy of the talk he had given at the hearing, as recorded by the stenographers, for him to revise as needed and be returned to the committee for study. The minutes of the meeting on March 8 state:

"Elder Daniells asked if Houteff received an edited copy of the [stenographic] notes of the Hoover Street meeting [at the Tabernacle on Monday, February 19]. Elder Calkins replied that this had been sent to him on February 21, but that nothing had been heard from him regarding these notes."³²

The report goes on to say: "It was moved that Elder Prout and another brother go to Houteff's home to find out if he had received the transcribed notes of the meeting at the Hoover Street Tabernacle on February 19 sent him by Elder Calkins on February 21. If he did not, these brethren were to give him a copy of these notes and tell him that a meeting had been arranged, the place to be announced later, for Friday, March 16, at about 9:00 o'clock in the morning, and that Houteff was requested to be present at this meeting to hear our reply."³³

Elder Calkins, in a letter concerning the meeting of February 19, 1934, says: "A few days later the transcribed notes were presented to Mr. Houteff, and I remember distinctly [that] I called him several times in the next two or three weeks to get back the corrected copy, which finally did reach our office. As soon as it arrived we called the full committee together to study carefully what he had presented in the light of the teachings of the Bible and the Spirit of prophecy."³⁴

In the meantime the denominational leaders in Washington, D.C., had received inquiries about Mr. Houteff's teachings. They had received copies of his writings, some of which had been mailed to them by him, and those who had examined them were convinced that they contained error. The matter was presented to the General Conference Committee on February 19, 1934, the same day on which Mr. Houteff was given the hearing on the West Coast. After discussing the matter, the General Conference Committee took this action: "*Voted*, that W. A. Spicer, F. M. Wilcox, and W. H. Branson be a committee to prepare material for a leaflet counteracting the false teaching of the 'Shepherd's Rod.'"³⁵

Elder Spicer was then a field secretary of the General Conference,

Elder Wilcox was editor of the *Review and Herald*, and W. H. Branson was president of the North American Division of the General Conference. Thus two different groups of men of experience were at work at the same time comparing the teachings of Mr. Houteff with those of the Bible and the Spirit of prophecy.

The Committee Reports

The group of ministers who listened to Mr. Houteff's discourse in Los Angeles on February 19 prepared a lengthy and unanimously approved answer for him. Two General Conference officers were on itineraries on the West Coast when Mr. Houteff's theories were being examined by the special committee out there. They were W. H. Branson and J. L. Shaw, treasurer of the General Conference. Both of these men were present when the committee's report was read to Mr. Houteff, and both approved the findings presented therein.²⁸

The report of the committee was read to Mr. Houteff and about a dozen of his followers on Sunday, March 18, instead of March 16, as tentatively planned, at the Olympic Auditorium. In its statement the committee pointed out to Mr. Houteff many errors in his teachings in conflict with both the Bible and the writings of the Spirit of prophecy. They made it clear to him that it would be impossible for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to accept his doctrines as truth, and they urged him to renounce his error.²⁸ They said: "Since error is found in the Shepherd's Rod, and it is in open disagreement with the Bible and the Spirit of prophecy, the only safe course is to reject its teaching and to discontinue its study."²⁵

The reader will recall that in the letter of January 18, which he had signed with his own hand, Mr. Houteff had made two solemn promises. The first was this: "In case the committee find error in the teaching of 'The Shepherd's Rod,' and are able to refute same by the teachings of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, Brother Houteff agrees to renounce the advocacy of the 'Shepherd's Rod,' and to make public renunciation of same."²⁵

The second promise was this: "Brother Houteff also agrees to discontinue the propagation of the 'Shepherd's Rod,' so far as he can control same, in the Pacific Union Conference, during the time this investigation is being made."²⁵

Before the committee could finish its work and present its re-

port, Mr. Houteff personally proceeded to organize his few followers into an association, with himself as its leader, for strengthening and furthering his cause. During that very period—from February 19 to March 18, 1934—while the investigation was being made, Mr. Houteff flagrantly broke his solemnly signed promise. Our record states that "during February and March of 1934 they held a general meeting of their followers. Not many were present, yet it was a representative meeting of adherents from different places."³⁵ Where did they meet? Mr. Houteff has stated that they "assembled in Los Angeles,"³⁶ and that the formal action taken to organize themselves was "adopted in open session" of his followers "assembled on this twelfth day of March, 1934."³⁶ The resolution adopted by the group was issued in the name of his "advisory committee."³⁶

Mr. Houteff did not wait for the brethren of experience investigating his teachings to present their report, but six days before the special committee appointed to hear him could present to him its findings he gathered his few followers together and in "open session" organized them under his leadership.

The General Conference Acts

On April 16, 1934, the special committee of three appointed by the General Conference Committee to prepare a manuscript on the teachings of Mr. Houteff, presented material for a leaflet of about thirty-two pages, and the General Conference Committee authorized the publication of five thousand copies over its name.³⁷ The pamphlet was entitled *A Warning Against Error*.

On May 8, 1934, the General Conference Committee in Washington, D.C., appointed a committee consisting of W. E. Howell, chairman; L. E. Froom, C. S. Longacre, F. D. Nichol, and N. Z. Town to examine the manuscript prepared by the Pacific Union Committee,³⁸ and on May 14 the General Conference Committee voted to "approve of the publication of the larger leaflet or pamphlet by the Pacific Union Conference as planned by them for use in their territory, and also making it available elsewhere as need of a fuller review of these teachings may arise."³⁹

This evidence indicates that any statement made that brethren of experience never examined the teachings of *The Shepherd's Rod*, and never labored with their author to show him that his views were erroneous, is not true to fact.

In 1934 the Autumn Council, with representatives from the various divisions of our worldwide organization present, voted approval of what had been done by the Pacific Union Conference and by the General Conference Committee in declaring that the Shepherd's Rod was teaching error:

"WHEREAS, It is of paramount importance that Seventh-day Adventists should be united in teaching the distinctive truths of our message, and in meeting subversive errors; therefore, *Resolved*, That we, the delegates to the 1934 Biennial Council, hereby approve the principles contained in the current booklet, 'A Warning Against Error,' as prepared by the General Conference Committee, and that we likewise endorse the similar booklet published by the Pacific Press."⁴⁰

The "booklet published recently by the Pacific Press" was the one entitled *A Reply to the Shepherd's Rod*, which was printed at the request of the Pacific Union Conference.

Action of the Carolina Conference

When the local Seventh-day Adventist church in Charleston, South Carolina, took official action against some of its members for their activities in connection with the Shepherd's Rod movement, it was upheld in this by the Carolina Conference Committee. The case was appealed to the General Conference, which voted:

"1. That the Carolina Conference of Seventh-day Adventists at a meeting of its Executive Committee held on April 2, 1934, acted within its rights and powers in denouncing the Shepherd's Rod teaching as a heresy.

"2. That the Carolina Conference of Seventh-day Adventists at a meeting of its Executive Committee held on April 2, 1934, acted within its rights and powers when it recommended to the Charleston church the disfellowshipping of those who do not renounce their allegiance to the Shepherd's Rod Movement.

"3. That the action taken April 2, 1934, by the Carolina Conference Executive Committee, wherein said Committee made certain recommendations, was not contrary to the instructions given on page 86 of the *Church Manual* entitled 'Establishing Tests of Fellowship,' in view of the fact that the General Conference Committee of Seventh-day Adventists had denounced the Shepherd's Rod Movement as a heresy.

"4. That the pamphlet entitled 'A Warning Against Error,' published to counteract the false teachings of the Shepherd's Rod and denouncing it as heresy, was authorized by the General Conference Executive Committee at a meeting of said Committee held on February 19, 1934, at which meeting the following members were present: I. H. Evans, W. H. Branson, M. E. Kern, W. H. Williams, F. M. Wilcox, G. W. Wells, J. A. Stevens, E. F. Hackman, N. Z. Town, E. L. Richmond, C. A. Russell, L. A. Hansen, H. H. Votaw, L. E. Froom, W. A. Spicer, C. S. Longacre, J. J. Ireland, H. H. Cobban, Miss Jensen, M. C. Taft. Others present: L. W. Graham, J. W. Mace, W. P. Elliott, F. D. Nichol, R. W. Conard, C. P. Bollman, and H. W. Barrows.

"5. That the Working Policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists as revised in 1930, page 9, Article 9, Section 2, relative to powers of the Executive Committee, reads as follows: 'Any seven members of the Executive Committee, including an officer of the General Conference, shall, after due notice to available members, constitute a quorum of the Executive Committee, and shall be empowered to transact such executive business as is in harmony with the general plans outlined by the Committee at the designated place of meeting of the Executive Committee as hereinafter provided.' Also on page 21 of the Working Policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Paragraph 5, will be found the following: ' . . . During the interim between these sessions, the Minority Committee shall constitute the body of final authority on all questions where a difference of viewpoint may develop, whose decision shall control on such controverted points, but whose decision may be reviewed at a session of the General Conference or a full council of the Executive Committee.'

"6. In harmony with the above provisions of the Working Policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the adoption of the aforesaid pamphlet entitled 'A Warning Against Error' constitutes an official General Conference denouncement of the Shepherd's Rod Movement as heresy."⁴¹

Note carefully that the General Conference Committee (in Section 1) declared that the Carolina Conference acted within its rights and powers "in denouncing the Shepherd's Rod teaching as a heresy," and (in Section 3) "that the General Conference Committee of Seventh-day Adventists had denounced the Shepherd's Rod Move-

ment as a heresy," and (in Section 6) that "the adoption of the aforesaid pamphlet entitled 'A Warning Against Error' constitutes an official General Conference denouncement of the Shepherd's Rod Movement as heresy." Thus the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in regard to the Shepherd's Rod movement is very clear.

Mount Carmel Center, Waco, Texas

Early in 1935 Mr. Houteff went to Texas, and about February 1 met with two of his followers in San Antonio to plan for the establishment of a center in that State, from which to direct their future activities. They secured 189 acres of land near Waco for that purpose.⁴²

In May, 1935, Mr. Houteff and eleven followers (including children) moved to Texas and ere long located on their property about six miles northwest of Waco, and thus established their colony called Mount Carmel Center.⁴³ In August of 1935, soon after they had settled there, Mr. Houteff made this pronouncement: "True we are establishing our headquarters on this mount that is found in prophecy, but our stay here shall be very, very short."⁴⁴

Twenty years later the *Waco Tribune-Herald* said of them: "The church has about 90 people, a third of them children, living at the center, has had as many as 125 there. Most are workers, about 12 are indigents in the rest home."⁴⁵

Reorganization of the Group

When Mr. Houteff's few followers were organized on March 12, 1934, to launch their group in an official way, they named no officers.⁴⁶ But Mr. Houteff himself was recognized as the leader and acted the part, and an "advisory committee" aided him. Later, in 1937, when Mr. Houteff was married, the group was reorganized under the name of "The General Association of the Shepherd's Rod Seventh-day Adventists."⁴⁶ The report does not mention any formal election of officers, but several were named. Among them were V. T. Houteff, president; Mrs. V. T. Houteff, secretary; and Mrs. S. Hermanson, treasurer. An executive council of nine members was appointed, with V. T. Houteff listed in first place, and Mrs. S. Hermanson and Mrs. V. T. Houteff among the other members. In reply to a disgruntled follower, Mr. Houteff said: "You approve

of the organization formed in 1934, but disapprove of the one formed in 1937, which is simply the outgrowth of the former, or, in other words, the difference between the two is that there were no officers mentioned in 1934, but there were in 1937.”⁴⁷

Note that Mr. Houteff did not deal with the really disconcerting aspect of the reorganization of 1937—that of concentrating the power of administration chiefly in the hands of his own family.⁴⁸ Mr. Houteff tells of naming a street Charboneau Drive “in commemoration of Sister Hermanson’s mother, Sister Florence Charboneau, who not only was the first of the pioneer believers but also the first treasurer of the Association of Davidian Seventh-day Adventists.”⁴⁹ After Mrs. Charboneau died at Waco, Texas, on December 2, 1935, her daughter, Mrs. Sophia Hermanson, was appointed treasurer.⁵⁰ And on January 1, 1937, Mr. Houteff was married to Florence Marcella Hermanson, the daughter of the treasurer. Soon after the wedding an announcement of the reorganization was made, with Mr. Houteff himself as president, Mrs. V. T. Houteff (his wife) as secretary, and Mrs. S. Hermanson (his mother-in-law) as treasurer, and with both of these women occupying positions on the executive council.

Mr. Houteff was once asked in writing: “Who are the present president, secretary, treasurer, and other departmental officers? Do you publish a yearbook that gives this information? If so, how much does it cost? How often do you hold your general conference sessions, and who elects the president and other officers of the Davidian Church?”⁵¹

In his written reply, Mr. Houteff said: “No, we do not have a yearbook nor do we hold general conference sessions. The only center of activities is here at Mount Carmel Center. The president, secretary, and treasurer respectively are as follows: V. T. Houteff, Mrs. F. M. Houteff, and Mrs. S. Hermanson.”⁵² This reply shows that the administrative power of the Shepherd’s Rod organization rested chiefly in the hands of Mr. Houteff himself, his wife, and his mother-in-law.

Mr. Houteff sought to pattern his organization after the theocratic system established by God for the government of ancient Israel. The leader, Mr. Houteff, was supposed to have been chosen by direct call of God. Other leaders were called and appointed through him, and they were to discharge their duties by his direc-

tion. An executive council was named and vested with authority "to fill vacancies that may occur in any of the association's officers, save the office of president."⁵³ Mr. Houteff held the presidency from the beginning until the day of his death.

Under such a supposedly theocratic system, in which the executive council could fill all vacancies "save the office of president," what would happen if the president should die? When Mr. Houteff died, on February 5, 1955, that problem was posed. Here is the way it was solved: "In harmony with recommendations made by Brother Houteff before his death the Executive Council, in accordance with the Constitution and By-laws of the General Association of Davidian Seventh-day Adventists, met and unanimously passed and adopted the following resolutions: That Mrs. Florence Houteff be appointed and elected to the office of Vice President of the General Association of Davidian Seventh-day Adventists; and that T. O. Hermanson be appointed and elected a member of the Executive Council."⁵⁴ This Mr. Hermanson is the brother of the vice-president, Mrs. V. T. Houteff, as well as son of the treasurer, Mrs. S. Hermanson.

Although the constitution and bylaws did not permit it to appoint and elect a president to succeed Mr. Houteff, the executive council could so choose a vice-president. And his wife was given that job "in harmony with recommendations made by Brother Houteff before his death."⁵⁴ Her former job of executive secretary was given to another person. But the control of the organization was kept in its founder's family.

Allegiance and Finances

Although Mr. Houteff's apostasy started by bitter criticism of the management of one of our sanitariums, and against the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, because of the care^e he received during illness prior to the camp meeting in Los Angeles in 1923, yet years later he cheerfully boasted of a much better financial deal by having bolted from the church and led away some of its members to Waco, Texas. He said: "And today after going through the nightmare of supposing I might live a life of poverty, as I explained before, my credit is unlimited, and the checks I write amount to thousands of dollars week after week, and year after year, although I am not bonded, own no property, and have no personal bank

account! Furthermore, I pay my secretaries as much as I pay myself and some of my workmen I pay twice as much. Yes, there are as great miracles today as there ever were."⁵⁵ Such was his personal, direct control over the funds of his organization!

It was Mr. Houteff's hope in the beginning that he might remain in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and leaven its membership with his peculiar teachings, and reform and reorganize the denominational organization in conformity with his wishes. He did not at first want to start a new church, or denomination, of his own, although he and his handful of followers had organized themselves outside of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on March 12, 1934. In order to achieve his objective he tried to keep as many of his followers and sympathizers as possible in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in order that they might bore from within. At the same time he wanted as much of the tithes and offerings as possible to flow out to him, in order that he and his organization might bore from without. On January 15, 1935, he bitterly denounced, as both wicked and foolish, the policies of the Seventh-day Adventist Church regarding the use of the tithes and offerings, since they barred such men as himself and his agents from making use of them for the furtherance of his work.⁵⁶

One month later—on February 15—he urged all of his sympathizers who could do so to remain in Seventh-day Adventist churches, saying: "Hence, if we separate ourselves by staying away from the churches, we give them the opportunity to accuse us of being an offshoot from the body, and ourselves lose the occasion to contact the people. Moreover, if we separate ourselves from the organization, then in the fulfillment of Ezekiel 9, when those who have not the mark are taken away, we shall have no right to claim possession of the denomination."⁵⁷ Thus the Shepherd's Rod heresy has been a conspiracy on the part of Mr. Houteff "to claim possession of the denomination." And at the same time he made a call for the tithes and offerings to be turned over to him by God's people.⁵⁸ And he tried thereafter to defend himself in doing so.⁵⁹

Steps Toward an Ecclesiastical Body

The entrance of the United States into World War II placed the adherents of the Shepherd's Rod in an embarrassing position because they did not openly profess to be a religious denomination

or ecclesiastical body separate, apart, and distinct from that of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and did not carry a formal church membership list of their own. The conscription of men for military service involved Mr. Houteff's followers.⁶⁰

Since the Shepherd's Rod Seventh-day Adventists did not function as an ecclesiastical organization in the eyes of the United States Government, and did not profess to be a religious denomination separate and apart from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, their men called to register at the draft boards were faced with a problem. So they asked Mr. Houteff: "As the Shepherd's Rod does not have a formal membership, what evidence can one give to identify himself as a member of the organization? And how can he establish the length of time he has been with it?"⁶¹ Thus the Shepherd's Rod organization found itself unprepared to provide its men with the documents necessary to show that they were either bona fide clergymen entitled to exemption or laymen entitled to consideration as noncombatants and Sabbathkeepers.

Immediately Mr. Houteff's General Association of The Shepherd's Rod Seventh-day Adventists set about to constitute themselves an ecclesiastical body with formal membership, and to prepare and issue ministerial credentials or licenses, and also certificates of church membership to those who needed such documentation and could qualify for them. It was then that they changed their name to that of The Davidian Seventh-day Adventists, and issued the document called *The Leviticus of the Davidian Seventh-day Adventists* containing the constitution, bylaws, and a general statement of their beliefs and practices as a church body. In doing this, they dropped the name of The Shepherd's Rod from their official title, and gave notice of it to their followers in these words:

"Having now, though, at the closing of its twelfth year [1942], progressed to the publication of the 'Leviticus,' the association receives from this governmental organ, the name, *Davidian Seventh-day Adventists*. No longer, therefore, does it borrow its name from its publications."⁶²

Then they announced: "Because a number of Davidian Seventh-day Adventists have been confronted with the need of identifying their church membership, and because the mother Seventh-day Adventist denomination denies this privilege to them, the Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Association has prepared a membership

certificate for all who are eligible and who desire to have one." ⁶³ In fact, they declared: "All officers serving the Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Association, as well as all Mt. Carmel residents, should hold the Certificate of Fellowship." ⁶⁴

No longer could they hide their colors and declare to men that they were bona fide members and representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Mr. Houteff's explanation was: "We were, of course, compelled to add Davidian to the name Seventh-day Adventists." ⁶⁵

Offshoots

When the Shepherd's Rod party was formed, and set about to lure the faithful to itself, Seventh-day Adventists were reminded of the warning given them many years ago by the Spirit of prophecy: "God has a church upon the earth, who are His chosen people, who keep His commandments. He is leading, not stray offshoots, not one here and one there, but a people." ⁶⁶

Mr. Houteff's following was an offshoot, and was called by that name from the beginning by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Back in 1935 he tried to evade that charge by instructing his followers to remain, if possible, within our ranks, saying: "If we separate ourselves by staying away from the churches, we give them the opportunity to accuse us of being an offshoot from the body." ⁶⁷ Again in 1936: "Moreover, to attempt to drive us by force from our churches, then brand us as 'offshoots' is an ironical paradox, the justice of which neither we can understand nor they explain." ⁶⁸

But when circumstances made it necessary during World War II for them to declare themselves as a denomination called Davidian Seventh-day Adventists and to grant certificates of fellowship, Mr. Houteff realized that it would be useless to keep on trying to hide the fact that they were an offshoot from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. So when they drew up their constitution, bylaws, et cetera, as an ecclesiastical body in 1942, he decided to acknowledge the fact and make the most of it, saying: "This association shall be known provisionally as The Davidian Seventh-day Adventists, the prophetic offspring of the parent Seventh-day Adventist, the Laodicean, church." ⁶⁹ And in the same connection they speak of "the name Seventh-day Adventist, which this association inherits from the parent denomination." ⁷⁰ Also: "The Davidians are the upshoot

from decadent Seventh-day Adventism.”⁷¹ Later, in October of 1947, he acknowledged that they were “emerging in 1930 from within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.”⁷²

In 1950 Mr. Houteff spoke of “an ever-increasing family of offshoots, the most prominent and the most tormenting of which is The Shepherd’s Rod.”⁷³ Although in 1935 and 1936 he had bitterly denounced Seventh-day Adventists for calling his party an “offshoot,” now in 1950 he himself labels it as “the most prominent” of “an ever-increasing family of offshoots”!

As long ago as 1934 and 1936 the Shepherd’s Rod was indeed fostering an ever-increasing family of offshoots. Our record of that time declares: “The disintegrating and dividing effect of erroneous teachings has already appeared in the ranks of the Shepherd’s Rod. A substantial number of them, some of them former leaders, have because of errors they found in ‘The Shepherd’s Rod,’ left the former leadership of V. T. Houteff and are meeting by themselves as a separate company. This runs true to form, and is in line with the history of preceding offshoots who have left us.”⁷⁴ The same still holds true of the Rodist movement.

“All Truth, or . . . No Truth”

Mr. Houteff became obsessed with the opinion that he had been specially chosen of God to bring new revelations of truth to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to direct its affairs. His writings abound with claims and allegations intimating that he was divinely invested with such authority. By August 31, 1931, he posed as a heaven-sent messenger endowed with infallibility, saying in a circular letter that he issued on that date:

“We must conclude that the ‘Rod’ contains all truth, or there is *no* truth in it save the quotations of truth. Therefore, if we admit one truth revealed by the ‘Rod,’ then we must accept it *all* as truth. . . . Therefore, we take the position that the message in the ‘Rod’ is free from error in so far as the idea put forth is concerned.”⁷⁵

He repeated that astonishing statement in 1935⁷⁶ and reaffirmed it in 1947.⁷⁷ In other words, he staked his claim to divine inspiration on the allegation that “if we admit one truth revealed by the ‘Rod,’ then we must accept it *all* as truth.”⁷⁵ Satan and his emissaries peddle spiritual food declared to be “the knowledge of good and evil,” a mixture of truth and error. Food that consists of ingredients

99 per cent wholesome and nutritious, and yet contains 1 per cent of deadly poison, would be dangerous to eat. The same principle applies to spiritual food. A false religion may teach some truth, but that fact does not make its teaching safe and acceptable to us. We reject it because it presents truth mingled with deadly error. That is why the Lord has given us warning after warning to be exceedingly careful when men arise professing to be heaven-sent messengers bringing new light. Here are a few of them:

"Men fall into error by starting with false premises and then bringing everything to bear to prove the error true. In some cases the first principles have a measure of truth interwoven with the error; but it leads to no just action; and this is why men are misled. They desire to reign and become a power, and, in the effort to justify their principles, they adopt the methods of Satan." ⁷⁸

A Work That Tears Down

"Those who start up to proclaim a message on their own individual responsibility, who, while claiming to be taught and led of God, still make it their special work to tear down that which God has been for years building up, are not doing the will of God. Be it known that these men are on the side of the great deceiver. Believe them not. They are allying themselves with the enemies of God and the truth. They will deride the order of the ministry as a system of priestcraft. From such turn away, have no fellowship with their message, however much they may quote the *Testimonies* and seek to entrench themselves behind them. Receive them not, for God has not given them this work to do." ⁷⁹

"False teachers may appear to be very zealous for the work of God, and may expend means to bring their theories before the world and the church; but as they mingle error with truth, their message is one of deception, and will lead souls into false paths. They are to be met and opposed, not because they are bad men, but because they are teachers of falsehood and are endeavoring to put upon falsehood the stamp of truth." ⁸⁰

Therefore, let us oft repeat it and never forget it, that Christ has said: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

Not all, we are sorry to say, are faithful in the discharge of their Christian duties, and many will be found wanting in the last great

day. That is what Christ Himself told us long ago, for "He has said that false brethren will be found in the church till the close of time."⁸¹

"It is true there are tares among the wheat; in the body of Sabbathkeepers evils are seen; but because of this shall we disparage the church?"⁸² That question was asked by the servant of the Lord in 1900. After showing from Romans 11:16-22 how all unfruitful members will be severed in due time from the true olive tree, she added: "Very plainly these words show that there is to be no disparaging of the agencies which God has placed in the church."⁸²

In 1893 the Lord's messenger gave the Seventh-day Adventist Church the following paragraphs of encouragement:

"The church militant is not now the church triumphant; but God loves His church, and describes through the prophet how He opposes and resists Satan, who is clothing the children of God in the blackest and most defiled garments, and pleading for the privilege of destroying them. The angels of God were protecting them from the assaults of the enemy."⁸³

"When men arise," she added, "claiming to have a message from God, but instead of warring against principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, they form a hollow square, and turn the weapons of warfare against the church militant, be afraid of them. They do not bear the divine credentials. God has not given them any such burden of labor. They would tear down that which God would restore by the Laodicean message. He wounds only that He may heal, not cause to perish. The Lord lays upon no man a message that will discourage and dishearten the church. He reproves, He rebukes, He chastens; but it is only that He may restore and approve at last."⁸⁴

"Although there are evils existing in the church, and will be until the end of the world, the church in these last days is to be the light of the world that is polluted and demoralized by sin. The church, enfeebled and defective, needing to be reproved, warned, and counseled, is the only object upon earth upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard."⁸⁵

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33522